

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

101027Z Jul 03

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001206

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/09/2013

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: APGA PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE OJUKWU MEETS AMBASSADOR

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reasons:
1.5 (B & D).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, APGA's Presidential candidate in the recent elections and leader of Biafra's failed secession in the sixties, met Ambassador Jeter at his residence on June 25 to discuss the Nigeria's elections, his observations on Obasanjo, and the way forward for Nigeria. End Summary.

ELECTIONS

¶12. (C) Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, APGA's 2003 Presidential candidate and leader of the East's (Biafra) failed secession in the sixties, requested a meeting with Ambassador to discuss current issues in Nigeria. Ojukwu commented that rigging had been expected but that what the governing PDP and Obasanjo did went beyond the pale of even Nigeria's permissible limits, forcing the opposition to contest the results. "Obasanjo is the incumbent and if he had rigged 10 percent, no one would have complained. Even if he only took 25 percent, we could have accepted it," Ojukwu claimed. However, Obasanjo "provoked" us and "rode roughshod" over the process to gain his re-election, Ojukwu declared. "I hold the President personally responsible for the failure of the elections," Ojukwu stated. Ojukwu said that he had told Obasanjo that he was his friend but, nonetheless, had to take responsibility. When Ambassador Jeter asked how Obasanjo responded, Ojukwu said simply, "he did not."

¶13. (C) Ambassador Jeter asked Ojukwu if he would pursue his case to the Supreme Court and commented that the quality of the electoral tribunals should not be pre-judged before the tribunals had actually finished their hearings. Ojukwu confirmed that he was committed to following the legal process to its conclusion, saying that it was the opposition's "only alternative." The Ambassador pointed to the computerized voters list and the guidelines for registering parties as positive outcomes from the 2003 elections, adding, moreover, that there had been no suggestion of military intervention. Ojukwu responded that talk of military intervention was present, and, indeed, increasing due to Obasanjo's hubris.
(Comment. We have no indication that this is true; in fact, Obasanjo has pretty much neutralized a politicized military. END COMMENT.)

ON OBASANJO

¶14. (C) Ojukwu commented on conversations held with the President since the elections. Ojukwu characterized Obasanjo as someone who feels he has "conquered" the country. Obasanjo pointed out that no leader in Nigeria's history had his level of control over the Middle Belt, the East, the Southwest and the National Assembly at the same time. Ojukwu says that he warned Obasanjo that this is not good politics and that Obasanjo's political barometer was off kilter. Ojukwu told Obasanjo that the Middle Belt is in arms, the East is in arms and, worse, the North is in arms. Ojukwu warned the President that he was making the same mistake that Gideon Orka made in 1990. (NOTE: The 1990 "Orka Coup" was unsuccessful. If it ever had a chance for success, Orka's coup became doomed when he announced his intent to excise the northern states from Nigeria, prompting a backlash from other officers

dedicated to keeping Nigeria together. END NOTE.) Ojukwu recounted Obasanjo responding that "if they (the North) try anything, I will deal with them."

15. (C) The Ambassador asked if Obasanjo had made efforts to balance representation in the government, pointing out that Obasanjo's Ministerial appointments come from every part of the country. Ojukwu responded that any balance in appointments was superficial. He said that a "bigger Yoruba presence, an angry North and an East cut out of the system" does not constitute balance. Commenting that Obasanjo is viewed as a "Yoruba President," Ojukwu said that the main problem is that he "draws lines without regard for the people." Ojukwu dismissed the Igbo appointees to the new Cabinet as politicians "unacceptable to the East." "I object to the feeling of conquest," Ojukwu complained. He said that Nigeria needed "accommodating politics" instead of confrontation, and that Obasanjo's pursuit of a Yoruba agenda was detrimental. Ojukwu commented that "public posturing does not solve problems" and stated that "we (Igbos) have always complained about being ruled by the North, but now we know it was infinitely better than Obasanjo."

16. (C) Ambassador Jeter asked if Ojukwu did not believe that the President would work harder this time to make the 2007 elections better in order to ensure his legacy. Ojukwu agreed that Obasanjo wanted a legacy but questioned whether Obasanjo's legacy was to seek immortality.

ON THE WAY FORWARD

17. (C) Ojukwu identified Nigeria's three major problems: 1) a crippled economy, 2) increased corruption, and 3) an extremely agitated North. He commented that he worries when the North is upset because "they follow no middle ground;" for them it is either acquiescence or an all-out fight. The Federation is faulty, Ojukwu claimed and stressed that Nigerians should not be over-emphasizing the divisions that already exist, as Ojukwu believed Obasanjo is doing. He said that Shari'a and Islamic "fundamentalism" are on the rise because of the other things going wrong. Instead of ignoring the problems, Ojukwu suggested that Nigerians should discuss specific limits and include them in the Constitution. "Instead, we don't talk about the problems, especially those related to Nigeria's unity," he averred.

18. (C) Ojukwu said that three weeks ago he advised Obasanjo to tell Nigerians that the Presidency was aware of the problems with the elections and assure the public of the Government's support for democracy. He proposed that Obasanjo call publicly for a National Conference and make sure that no one tampers with its decisions. He said Obasanjo should also clean up the problems with INEC. Ojuwku said that the President's first step should be to "sack the entire Commission" and institute policies to improve the independence of elections in Nigeria.

19. (C) As the meeting drew to a close, Ambassador reminded Ojukwu that a cardinal principle of U.S. policy on Nigeria was to maintain the country's territorial integrity. That policy had not changed, and we would oppose efforts, from any quarter, that sought to fragment the country.

COMMENT

110. (C) Despite Ojukwu's claim of friendship with Obasanjo, there is a history of enmity between them. Ojukwu threw Nigeria into a costly, tragic civil war that claimed at least a million lives and ended when Biafra surrendered to the GON's commanding general, Obasanjo.

111. (C) Obasanjo considers himself Nigeria's foremost nationalist while he sees Ojukwu as Nigeria's worst secessionist. If Ojukwu has somehow managed to like Obasanjo, we doubt if that feeling is reciprocated. Moreover, it is true that secessionist

embers die hard and still burn in Ojukwu's chest. Nevertheless, his influence and popularity among the Igbo are unassailable. For many, he symbolizes the Igbo's unrequited aspirations for national leadership in Nigeria or in a republic they can call their own. Because of his special status, he helped attract significant support to APGA in the April elections. But for vote manipulation in the five Southeastern states, APGA probably might have won numerous National Assembly seats and 1 to 3 gubernatorial races (Enugu, Anambra and Imo).

¶12. (C) The election also gave Ojukwu a new lease on political life that he is exploiting with flare. He has now added the sobriquet of "wronged Presidential candidate" to his litany of perceived injustices by the GON. Pointing to the legitimate flaws in the election in the Southeast, Ojukwu is attempting to stoke Igbo sentiment by publicly claiming Obasanjo's election is illegitimate. He and other Igbo leaders are also contemplating establishing a shadow government, a move that will worsen his relations with Abuja and likely alienate other parts of the country.

¶13. (C) Many of Ojukwu's moves and utterances are bombastic. Yet much of it reflects genuine frustration among the Igbo that the election results were excessively tampered. Because the electoral tribunals will overturn very few, if any, of the Southeast races and because Obasanjo has dismissed the idea of reaching a "political solution" with Igbo moderates to allow APGA to reclaim some seats, many Igbo politicians who otherwise would have kept their distance have rallied around Ojukwu. Now the question is will Ojukwu fizzle out in time or will he continue to agitate. While widespread violence and unrest is unlikely from this quarter, continued Ojukwu posturing could keep political tension in the Southeast high.

JETER